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News

### **New state business group forms**

Several major business have joined together to form the **Wisconsin Business Council**, a group whose aim is to improve public policy and strengthen the state's economic performance.

The council said it intends to work with citizens, elected officials and policy makers to develop a pro-business, pro-employment agenda.

Council members include, **American Transmission Co.**, **Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield**, **MillerCoors**, **AT&T Wisconsin**, **Commerce State Bank**, **Midwest Natural Gas**, **Orion Energy Systems** and Madison's **Park Bank**.

"When we talk about how we can sustain our quality of life, we're really talking about the need to establish a better business climate, one that opens the door to opportunity, innovation and employment," said Phil Prange, the council's president and chief executive officer and owner of consulting firm **Gateway Ventures**.

"The Wisconsin Business Council was established because we believe there are mutually beneficial solutions to the challenges we face today," Prange said. "If the current economic downturn has made one thing clear, it's that a flourishing private sector is critical for family-supporting jobs and a robust tax base."

Scott VanderSanden, the council's chairman and president of AT&T Wisconsin, says more must be done to energize and advance efforts that promote Wisconsin as a good place to live and do business.

"As the nation's economy begins to stabilize, smart businesses will be looking for opportunities to resume growth," VanderSanden says. "We need to make sure Wisconsin's business climate and policies welcome new investment and encourage job creation. We need to send a strong signal that Wisconsin is a place where businesses can grow and prosper during the next business cycle and beyond."

Members of the council say the organization's optimistic outlook and proactive stance will lead to a constructive dialogue among elected officials, legislative leaders, policy experts and members of the general public. Ultimately, however, the council's private sector supporters will be looking for real results.

"Our future vitality requires a comprehensive strategy that recognizes the broad nature of our existing economic base and the unique strengths of our work force," said Jim Senty, a member of the council's advisory board, who also serves as president of Midwest Natural Gas, of La Crosse, and chairman of Park Bank, of Madison. "At the same time, we need to be realistic about areas where our performance needs improvement and devise effective strategies to achieve new levels of success."

Marc Marotta, a member of the Wisconsin Business Council's board of directors and former secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Administration, said the state is fortunate because of the diverse nature of its industries, ranging from manufacturing and agriculture to insurance, health care and retail. However, the state's work force lags the national average in the percentage of workers with advanced degrees and

also falls below average in the number of workers employed in what the U.S. Department of Labor classifies as high-technology jobs.

“The Wisconsin Business Council wants to give voice to these issues, while engaging leaders throughout the state in an aggressive search for solutions,” said Prange. “From our solid K–12 schools and higher education system to our technical colleges and apprentice training programs, we have many of the key building blocks in place. At the same time, it’s clear more must be done to preserve these assets and establish a more vibrant business climate.”

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